

The Norris-McCue Building  
412 East Jefferson Street  
Charlottesville  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1003

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE NORRIS-MCCUE BUILDING

HABS No. VA-1003

Location: 412 East Jefferson Street, Charlottesville, Virginia; on the south side of street, facing the town's court square.

Present Owner: Edward O. McCue, Jr.

Present Use: Edward O. McCue, Jr, Edward O. McCue III Law Offices: Hudson Insurance Agency.

Significance: This Federal rowhouse, dating from the early 1800's, and built as a residence along the courthouse square in Charlottesville, should be noted on the exterior for the arched brick steps to the first floor entrance, and for the service hall penetrating through the building to the street. Built in the style of its period, it is a well-preserved example of the Charlottesville cityscape of the nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The land on which the building now stands was not originally a part of the City of Charlottesville. Edmund Anderson first acquired the land (and much surrounding land as well) in 1813 from Clifton Rhodes of Darren County, Kentucky<sup>1</sup> for the sum of \$4,800. Lots were divided and sold separately to individuals.

In the meantime Mr. Anderson and his wife Nancy moved to Richmond. On June 15, 1820, Opie Norris and John Ragland, both of Charlottesville, purchased what was known as LOT 57 from the Andersons for \$1500.<sup>2</sup> There was no mention of any structure at this time. Mr. Anderson's original purchase was added to the city in 1829.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime John Ragland died (1823) and Opie Norris (See Historical Associations), purchasaed his rights to the property. All records of the property at this time are quite sketchy if at all existant. It appears that Opie Norris died, leaving his estate to his wife with the stipulation that if any of his children married or left Charlottesville then they were to be given a certain amount of the estate. At his wife's death will<sup>4</sup> named the children to be equal heirs to all property. A sale was mentioned as a possible way of dividing the estate equally. The parcel seems to have

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<sup>1</sup>Albemarle County Deed Book 18 page 258 dated 1/5/1813.

<sup>2</sup>Albemarle County Deed Book 22 page 324 dated June 15, 1820.

<sup>3</sup>Albemarle County Surveyor's Book 2 pages 149, 151, 155; 5/9/1829

<sup>4</sup>Albemarle County Will Book 13 page 276 dated 2/12/1838.

been sold by George Perkins, Commissioner of the Circuit Court, to settle the estate of Opie Norris. The parcel was divided into four lots shown on a plat made by J. W. Dolin, Esq. Lot 4 was conveyed to B. L. Powell and was described in the Deed Book as follows:

"A certain House and Lot in the town of Charlottesville, Va. lately belonging to the heirs of Opie Norris dec'd situated on what is known as 'The Public Square' in said town and adjoining on one side the property now occupied by Dr. R. W. Nelson, and on the other the property now occupied by Lewellyn Wood Esq.— the ground floor of the house hereby sold fronts on Jefferson Street 16 feet, 2 inches, but the Second Story of said house extends over the passage of the house now occupied by Dr. R. W. Nelson so that the Second Story of said Powells house fronts on Jefferson Street 20 1/2 feet."<sup>5</sup>

This deed contained the first mention of any structure. It can safely be assumed that the structure was erected sometime during Opie Norris's lifetime. It was erected between the Opie Norris house and a structure owned by John Cochran, using their side walls as party walls. As mentioned in the deed, in 1874 the property was bounded on the west by property owned by Dr. Nelson who also purchased the land (lot 3 on the Dolin Plat) from George Perkins, acting as Commissioner of the Circuit Court. The eastern boundary was formed by the property line of the Lewellyn Wood, Esq. estate.

B. L. Powell died intestate, leaving his estate to his three children: W. L. Powell, L. F. Powell, and H. H. Garriguis. In 1879 these three sold the land and structure to William Jeffries for \$600.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Jeffries died and the property passed on to his son according to his will, which stated:

"I hereby bequeath and devise to my son Branch E. Jefferies the house and lot in which I now live, lying and being on the public square in the town of Charlottesville, I also give and bequeath to my said son all the household and kitchen furniture in said house."<sup>7</sup>

Soon after acquiring it, Branch and his wife Mattie H. conveyed the property to Patrick Grady. The value of the parcel had increased and the sale price at this time was \$7,600.<sup>8</sup>

The history of the structure now moves into a period governed by transfers

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<sup>5</sup>Albemarle County Deed Book 69 page 217 11/6/1874.

<sup>6</sup>Albemarle County Deed Book 74 page 468 dated April 1, 1879.

<sup>7</sup>Albemarle County Will Book 2 page 72 dated 2/11/1884.

<sup>8</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 1 page 322 dated 5/30, 1888.

within the Grady family. Patrick Grady died, and according to his will, equal shares of his estate were left to his three children, Sarah Agnes Grady, Leo Patrick Grady, and Francis E. Mitchell. His will described his possession as follows:

"My property at present consists of the house and lot on the south side of Jefferson Street, between Fourth and Fifth Streets, in the City of Charlottesville, being the same property conveyed to me by Branch E. Jeffries and wife by deed of May 30, 1888, of record in the office of the Clerk of the Corporation Court of said city in D.B. 1, p. 322."<sup>9</sup>

Each of Patrick Grady's heirs owned 1/3 of the property.

In 1939 Francis E. Mitchell handed over her 1/3 to her brother and sister for the "sum of \$10.00 cash in hand paid, and other valuable considerations, consisting of money loaned and advanced."<sup>10</sup> After this transaction Sarah Grady and Leo Grady each owned 1/2 of the property.

Soon after this Leo died, "seized and possessed", and Francis once again found herself an owner, this time of 1/4 of the property, while her sister owned 3/4 of it. Leo's share has been divided equally between the sisters since he died intestate, and was subject to the dower interest of his widow, Elizabeth L. Grady.

Francis relinquished rights, again, for "\$10.00 cash in hand paid."<sup>11</sup> Sarah gained full rights to the property with 1/2 being subject to the dower interest of Elizabeth Grady.

Tragedy once again struck the Grady family when Sarah died, intestate, "unmarried, and without issue." The reluctant owner Francis Mitchell once more found herself the owner of her father's estate: she was the sole heir of Sarah Grady.

The property finally passed out of the hands of the Grady family in 1937 when Francis Mitchell, her husband Nat, and Elizabeth Grady sold the land and house to Edward O. McCue, Jr., for "\$10.00 cash in hand paid, and other considerations deemed valuable in law."<sup>12</sup>

Since acquiring the land in 1937, Mr. McCue has made two transactions concerning the property. The first, in 1955, was the transfer of the southern portion of the lot to Mr. Noel Arrowsmith for \$750.00 cash.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>City of Charlottesville Will Book 4 page 2 dated 10/28/1929.

<sup>10</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 77 page 116 date 9/2/32.

<sup>11</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 79 page 472 dated 5/8/33.

<sup>12</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 93 page 417 dated 10/25/37.

<sup>13</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 189 page 1 dated 12/13/55.

The second transfer concerned acquiring the passage hall at the west side of the structure from Beverly Clover who owned 410 East Jefferson Street at the time.<sup>14</sup> It consisted of a 4.33 foot frontage along the southeast side of Jefferson Street, known as parcel 1B in a plat made by W. S. Roudabush, Jr. and Associated,<sup>15</sup> extending south to the property owned by the Daily Progress newspaper. The Deed declares that the eastern wall of the Clover Property be considered a party wall and also clarified conditions of ingress and egress across the Clover property to the McCue Building.

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<sup>14</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 248 page 4 dated 12/3/63.

<sup>15</sup>City of Charlottesville Deed Book 245 page 367.

#### HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Opie Norris, Esq., the original owner of this structure, was also the outstanding character in its history. Opie Norris "was a man of mark, an upright magistrate, a citizen of sterling worth, and was useful and beneficial to this community as any man that ever lived here."<sup>1</sup> Supposedly he was the "tallest and thinnest man in Charlottesville."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Norris was a prominent gentleman in the community; his business dealings as a merchant were highly regarded. He played a major role in helping to establish the Three Edmund Anderson Additions as part of the city, thus benefiting Charlottesville as a private citizen. Serving as a Town Trustee and also a county magistrate occupied much of his later life until he became an invalid and was unable to serve. He died in 1839, the estate going to his wife.

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<sup>1</sup>James Alexander, Early Charlottesville: Recollections, Albemarle County Historical Society, 1942.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The structure is a typical four bay federal townhouse of the early to middle nineteenth century, with two floors above grade and a third one-half level below grade. The floor layout is a traditional two room division of each floor, front to back. The building shares a non-structural party wall with adjacent structures of either side; joists run parallel to these walls, spanning from the front and rear structural brick walls to a central load-bearing wall. A standing seam tin gable roof covers the attic. The building is approximately twenty feet wide with a transverse dimension of about thirty-three feet.
2. Condition: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Foundations: Inaccessable
2. Wall Construction: Exterior walls are of common red brick laid in a continuous running bond. The east and west party walls are masonry: red brick laid in a flemish bond can be seen in the attic. With the exception of the cornice detail, there are no belt courses or other ornamental brickwork. Interior walls are painted plaster throughout. Both interior and exterior walls are in good condition.
3. Structural System: The north and south (front and back) walls are masonry bearing walls. The party walls carry no load and are structurally independent of the building. Floor/ceiling systems consist of joists spanning from the north and south walls to a central load-bearing wall. The roof is pitched to a central peak and no ridge board is used. 2 x 5" cross bracing runs parallel to attic joists and rafters at a height of about four feet. The rafters are 2 x 4". A majority of the wood visible in the attic has been joined with 3/4"-1" diameter wood pegs.
4. Porches, Stoops: The unique feature of the front stoop, which provides access to the first floor, is its brick supporting arch. A poured-concrete platform over the furnace room provides the rear

stoop. A small stoop exists on the front where the service hall pierces the structure. Cast iron railings adorn the front, while steel pipe handrails (recent) adorn the back.

5. Chimneys: The only chimney visible on the exterior serves the furnace: nineteen by twenty-one inches on the rear south wall. However, two other chimneys servicing fireplaces on the east party wall have been removed to a level just below the present roof; the fireplaces they once served have been completely removed, mantles and hearth, without a trace.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and Doors: There are three doors on the front north wall: the main entrance: with a large glass panel; the door to the service hall: wood throughout; and a third allowing access to the ground floor with an elaborate classical entablature surrounding the glass paneled door. The entablature was added sometime in this century. Two modest rear doors provide access to the rear much in the same way as in the front; another glass paneled door opens to the ground floor in the rear, and the furnace room door is simple board and bracing.
  - b. Windows and Shutters: Wooden double hung windows are the rule in this structure with a six over nine lite sash being typical. Concrete sills are used on the rear windows ( the exception is the small stair way window on the back with a wooden sill); all the front windows have wood framing throughout.
7. Roof: There is a simple gable roof on this building with a parapet on the east formed by the adjoining party wall; the roof on the west is the same height as the adjoining structure on the west. A standing seam tin roof is laid on top of wood rafters (2 x 4") with nailers attached. A most interesting feature is the snow angels which adorn the roof near the gutter line. The cornice is two courses of extended brick known as a mousetooth design. The gutter is attached both with bolts and metal straps extending from the snow angels. The tin roof extends over the inner edge of the gutter.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

- a. Ground floor: The front door on the left side of the facade opens to the main room on the ground floor. A small bathroom opens to this main room, and a central passage leads through a transverse hall into the rear room. Off this small hall, stairs lead to the first floor but have been blocked off to facilitate use of this floor as a separate office.
  - b. First floor: The main door opens into a major space which dominates this level of the building. There is passage from here to a secondary rear room and a stair hall leading to the second floor. A hall extending from the front to the rear of the building lies at the ~~far~~ west end of the structure and connects with the stair hall about halfway through the building.
  - c. Second floor: A hall extends from the top of the stairs in the rear towards the front of the building. Two rooms lie to the east of the hall which terminates in a small bathroom.
  - d. Attic: Accessable from the second floor hall, the attic is clear space with all rafters and joists exposed.
2. Stairways: The stair from the ground floor to the the first floor level is a rather plain example and takes of the appearance of a "back stair". The main stair has a U shape with a high window located at the landing which is about three-quarters the way to the top. A simple baluster adorns one side and a very nicely crafted railing exists at the second floor level.
3. Flooring: The majority of the building is now carpeted with some linoleum at the entrances. Certain areas show the base material to be hardwood strips approximately 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide, running north-south through the building.
4. Wall and Ceiling finish: Most walls and ceilings are painted plaster. Some gypsum board has been used where new walls have been added on the ground floor. A light green-pastel paint is used on all walls, both above and below the chair rail. The ceilings are painted white.



5. Doorways and Doors: Wooden panel doors are typical of this scale building and are used on the interior. Typical door sizes are about three by six and one-half feet. Doors, chair rail, window moldings, and interior cornices are all finished in the same color.
6. Interior trim; Some outstanding bookcases, added when the building was remodeled into offices are on the third floor. All other trim is typical of the period. All trim is painted a medium olive green.
7. Hardware: No original hardware exists on the exterior as it has been replaced for security reasons. Some interior doors have what appears to be original hardware on them.
8. Mechanical and electrical equipment: At present, heating is by radiators, lighting is through fluorescent fixtures.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The Norris-McCue Building is one of a row of structures on East Jefferson Street which dates from the nineteenth century. The front facade of the building is oriented to the north and faces Jackson Park, a part of Court Square. All the area between the sidewalk and the building is paved and access is made directly from the sidewalk. A concrete retaining wall holds a bank of earth at the far west side of the front lot. Situated directly behind the building is a parking lot serving the entire block.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of a project undertaken by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Associate Professor of Architecture. This project was documented by Tim Revere and Jeff Bushman, architecture students. The documentation was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.